United Nations S/2018/184

Security Council

Distr.: General
5 March 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 2 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Security Council plans to hold an open debate on Wednesday, 28 March 2018, on the theme "Collective action to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations". The objective of the open debate is to discuss ways to improve the engagement of all actors (host nations, regional organizations, the Security Council, Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries, and the Secretariat) in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly in today's complex and high-risk environments.

In this regard, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has prepared the attached concept note (see annex). It is our hope that the concept note will assist the participating delegations in making focused interventions. I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Karel J. G. **van Oosterom**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

18-03413 (E) 080318

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 2 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme "Collective action to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations: supporting greater impact and performance in today's complex and high-risk environments", to be held on 28 March 2018

Summary

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is organizing a high-level open debate on the theme "Collective action to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations", to be held on 28 March 2018.

The objective of the debate is to discuss ways to improve the engagement of all actors in support of United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly in today's complex and high-risk environments. This is a shared responsibility for all actors involved (host nations, regional organizations, the Security Council, Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries, and the Secretariat). Key to this will be how we can work together better to deliver on the primacy of the political process needed to underpin long-term conflict resolution and enhance the impact and performance of operations.

A lack of progress or even a deterioration of the situation in countries such as South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali and the high casualty rate from hostile acts against civilians and peacekeepers underscore the urgency of this issue.

Background

1. United Nations peacekeeping has played a crucial role in achieving security and sustaining peace in many conflicts, most recently in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. For millions of civilians, the United Nations is the last station that "saves them from hell". Tens of thousands of peacekeepers (military, police and civilians) do their utmost to carry out their mandate. Men and women risk their lives on a daily basis to protect others, with too many having to make the ultimate sacrifice.

2. In the past decade, the number of major civil wars has nearly tripled, and conflicts have become increasingly complex. Transboundary factors, such as environmental degradation, transnational organized crime and violent extremism, build on and exacerbate local rivalries. Often, there is no credible and inclusive political process to implement a peace agreement, and parties to the conflict are not committed to finding a lasting negotiated solution. In some situations, rebel groups, Governments, criminal organizations and other parties are actively undercutting or obstructing a political solution, sometimes blocking humanitarian access and targeting civilians caught up in the conflict. As a result, women, men and children suffer and displacement and migration soar.

3. At the same time, we are witnessing a rise in attacks, including terrorist attacks, against peacekeepers in several operations. The year 2017 saw the highest number of peacekeeper fatalities from acts of violence in absolute terms in over two decades.

4. In the majority of countries or regions where missions are now deployed, the circumstances are dramatically different from two decades ago. Some peacekeeping operations are faced with asymmetric threats and actors who do not abide by international law. In the report entitled "Improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers", the former United Nations Force Commander, Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, concluded that the United Nations and Member States are failing to adapt to the new realities in the field. In its report, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations also identified the necessity of change and called for more tailor-made approaches.

Taking responsibility

5. In order to be able to deal with new realities, the various actors with a stake in peacekeeping operations must renew their partnership of shared responsibility and push through some of the most urgently needed reforms. These reforms require swift yet considered action by the Security Council, Member States (including troop- and police-contributing countries), the Secretariat and regional organizations.

Security Council

6. One of the main responsibilities of the Security Council is to provide peacekeeping operations with sound, realistic and — where necessary — robust mandates. Unfortunately, mandates are not always tailored to the specific context of the mission in question, and in some cases they are not entirely realistic, manageable or achievable. Moreover, mandates are not always in line with the operational challenges in the field, nor are they consistently backed up with the requisite political, financial and human resources.

7. Strengthening the primacy of the political process also involves the sequencing of mandated tasks, as difficult conflict situations may require careful choices regarding prioritization. In some situations, a solution could be to modify a mission's footprint in order to maximize its impact. In others, it may be to take a phased

approach, initially focusing on a narrower set of critical tasks and then broadening the mission's scope as the environment changes. It is up to the Security Council to forge a consensus, to sequence and focus mandates to address the most pressing priorities and to provide political support to host States, regional actors and others in order to ensure that peacekeeping missions can fulfil the tasks given to them.

8. The Security Council should set clear strategic objectives and ask the Secretariat for mission-wide strategies with concrete outcomes and a clearly articulated desired end state that supports those objectives. Such strategies should provide guidance for all mission components (military, civilian and police) and offer a clear basis for defining achievable short-, medium- and long-term goals that can be translated into component-level plans, directives and resource requirements.

9. Strategies should also take into account the activities of other United Nations actors and partners in the field, most notably the United Nations country team, regional organizations and international financial institutions. The strategies should contain benchmarks to assist the mission leadership and the Security Council in assessing progress and allow them, if needed, to make appropriate changes to the mandate or take other action. In order to achieve the desired impact, the Council needs to make decisions on the basis of better analysis of the situation on the ground, realistic goals and the availability and applicability of the various peace and security tools at its disposal. Strategic reviews can be a useful tool in that respect.

10. The Security Council has a key role to play with regard to host nations. Regrettably, the world has seen too many situations in which host nations backtrack on their commitments or violate international law. In those instances in which host nations do not cooperate with the United Nations, undermine it or even target their own citizens, the Council must be united and strong in its response, including condemnations, country visits, close engagement with regional organizations and the option of sanctions. Council members should echo these messages bilaterally at the country level.

Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries

11. As highlighted in the reports by Lieutenant General Cruz and Major General Patrick Cammaert, it is the responsibility of Member States to provide the United Nations with adequate troops and capabilities. Troops should be properly trained, equipped and ready to face the challenges of peacekeeping in complex and high-risk environments. As emphasized in the Cruz report, underperformance can be fatal. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that 44 Member States have taken up the responsibility to adhere to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians.

12. In addition, there is a need to change the mindset: it must be clear that peacekeepers can be called upon to step in. They must be prepared to act decisively and may need to use force in defence of the mandate, especially when it comes to protecting civilians.

13. Consecutive United Nations peacekeeping defence ministerial conferences (the most recent having been held in Vancouver, Canada, in November 2017) have been successful in producing significant pledges of troop, police and training capabilities by Member States. However, the timely availability of specialized assets remains a challenge, especially for some of the most high-risk areas in missions.

14. Despite broad agreement that their increased participation would contribute to the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping, the percentage of women in uniform has increased only slightly. Member States should step up their efforts to improve this, since women's participation in peacekeeping is instrumental to delivering peace on the ground.

15. There is growing pressure to achieve cost savings. At the same time, mandates need adequate resources. While the United Nations has a responsibility to demonstrate good stewardship of Member States' contributions, United Nations peace operations must be granted the resources required to ensure the delivery of mandates as well as the safety and security of personnel.

Secretariat

16. The primary goal of a peace operation must be to enable sustainable political processes. In pursuit of this goal, the Secretary-General needs to assert his right to engage with all parties to a conflict, particularly in settings where the legitimacy and impartiality of the United Nations are called into question by the parties to a conflict, and to report to the Security Council when the required level of commitment to the political process, or cooperation within the United Nations, is not observed.

17. Regional and subregional organizations, in particular the African Union, are increasingly helping to address peace and security challenges. They are often charged with leading the political processes that need to underpin long-term conflict resolution, and they are increasingly engaged in peace enforcement activities, often alongside United Nations peace operations. However, these efforts to foster a political process — through dialogue, negotiations and national reconciliation — can encounter difficulties and delays.

18. Meanwhile, peacekeeping operations face elevated risks, as well as costs, without a commensurate level of political leverage or responsibility for pushing parties to the conflict towards a peaceful settlement of disputes. Only a truly joined-up approach between the United Nations and regional and subregional actors can generate the necessary progress in the political process.

19. The Secretariat, in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, has a responsibility to support missions efficiently and effectively, on the basis of demand from the field. Red tape should be cut and, where possible, responsibilities should be delegated to the field. The Secretary-General's reforms focusing on peace and security, management and the development system are an opportunity to overcome issues of fragmentation and compartmentalization, and they should strengthen the coordination between the different actors in the Secretariat, both at Headquarters and in the field. A truly integrated approach which also takes account of United Nations funds and programmes and other international assistance is necessary to deliver peace.

20. As indicated in the Cruz report, the United Nations must ensure that its missions are staffed and led by well-trained personnel with the right knowledge, equipment and mindset for the job, and it must hold those personnel to account for their performance. The Strategic Force Generation and Capability Planning Cell has helped to follow through on pledges made at leaders' summits and defence ministerial conferences and generate more commitments of contributions by Member States. This helps the Secretariat to uphold higher standards of performance and accountability and to take remedial action when necessary.

21. Critical enablers and capacities (for example, helicopters, MEDEVAC and peacekeeping intelligence) are fundamental to the success of missions in high-risk environments. Efforts by the Secretariat to ensure the availability of these capabilities must continue, with the help of long-term rotation schemes, among other things. This also requires timely and long-term commitments from Member States in delivering those critical enablers.

22. Independent mission reviews commissioned by the Secretary-General are a relatively new and useful tool, and recommendations should lead to swift changes in

the field. When proposing new or reconfigured operations, the Secretariat should also provide options that span the whole spectrum of possible responses.

23. Finally, the Secretariat should provide the Security Council with frank analysis of the conflict and honest reporting on what a mission can achieve given the means and resources available, providing the Council with options and recommendations. Those insights should be shared in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Council so as to better inform decision-making.

Conclusion

24. Managing the current challenges in peacekeeping requires all actors to fully commit to fulfilling their responsibilities in support of peacekeeping, from the political strategy to operational issues, in order to adapt to the changing nature of conflicts.

Issues for discussion

25. To help to guide the debate, Member States could consider addressing the following questions in their statements:

(a) How can we ensure that the Security Council, regional organizations and other key actors work together more effectively to pursue and deliver political solutions, and increase strategic coherence?

(b) Given the shared sense of urgency to improve United Nations peacekeeping operations in complex and high-risk environments, how should success be defined in those circumstances, and how can we better monitor progress?

(c) Specifically, what can the different actors — host nations, regional organizations, the Security Council, Member States, including troop- and police-contributing countries, and the Secretariat — do to deliver more effectively on their responsibility to improve peacekeeping operations?

(d) What actions should be taken to strengthen the whole-of-mission approach to peacekeeping operations, integrating political, civilian and military elements?

(e) How can we revive a sense of shared responsibility for the success of peacekeeping operations among key stakeholders, including the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries, regional organizations, host nations and financial contributors?

(f) What should be done to ensure that the most challenging peacekeeping missions are given the required capabilities and resources (for example, finances, critical enablers and well-trained troop- and police-contributing countries)?

Briefers

- Secretary-General
- Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki
- Director of the non-governmental organization GREFFA (Women's Action, Research, Study and Training Group), Fatimata Touré